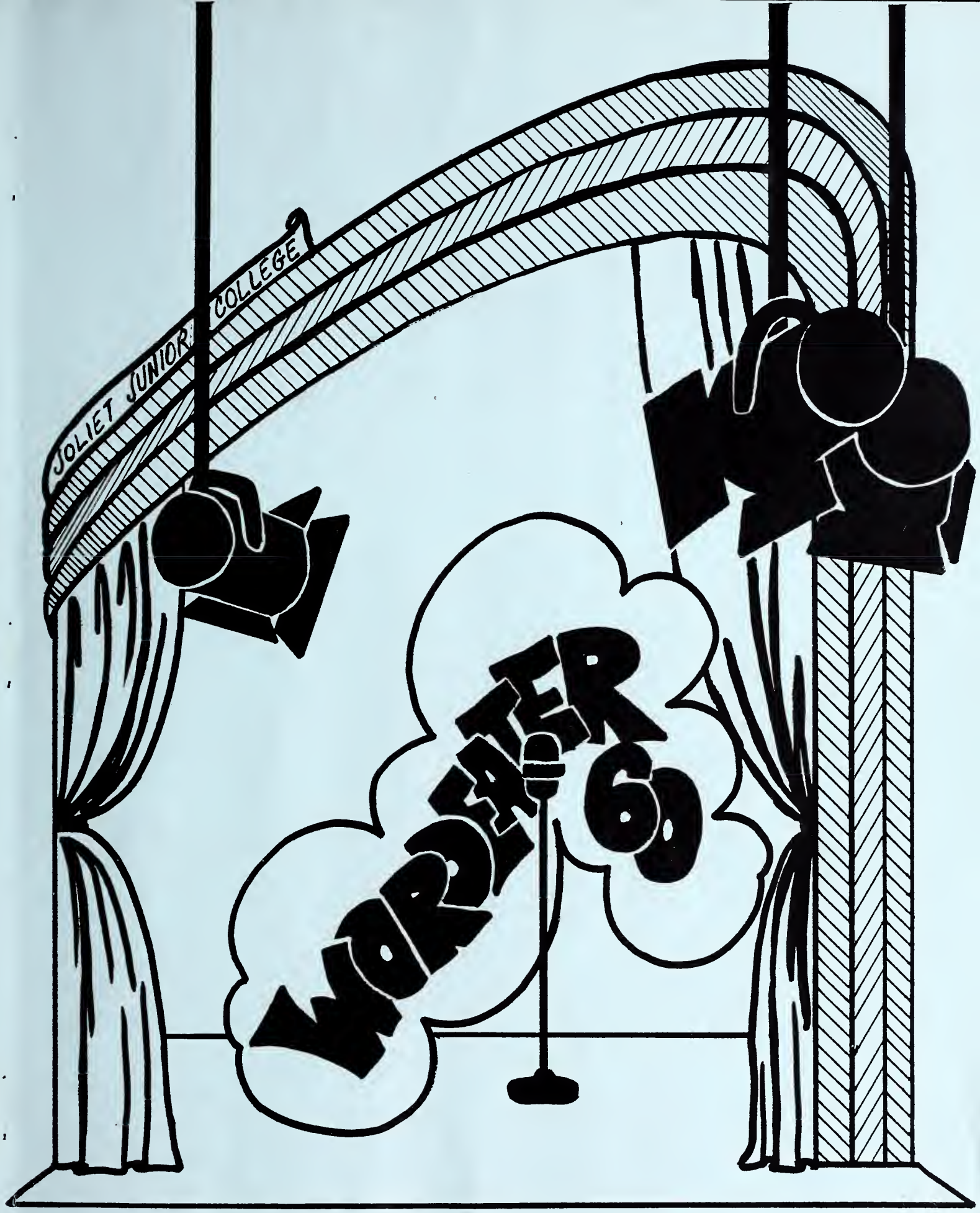
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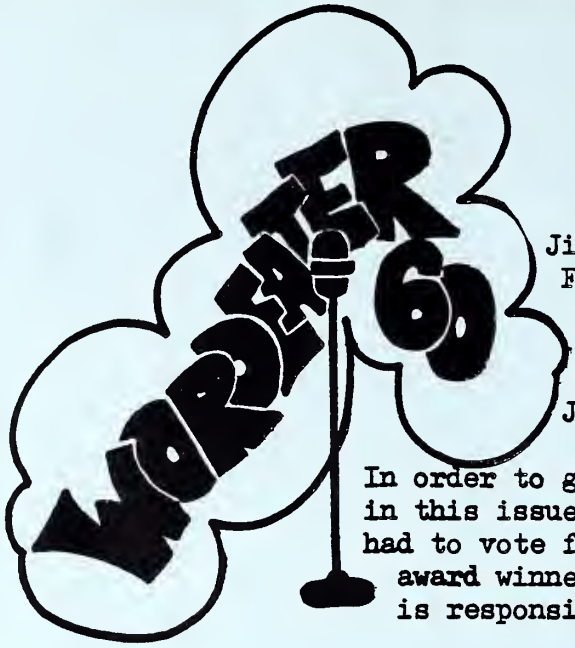

STAFF:

Jill Compton, Virginia Fenili, Mary Ann Kostal, Robin McWilliams, Kevin Meehan, Patricia Shue, John Stobart

In order to get a selection published in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

October 2, 1987
November 20, 1987

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Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 61 must be submitted to John Stobart in Room C-1069 by:

October 2, 1987

Manuscripts will not be returned and SHOULD BE TYPED.

AWARDS

PROSE

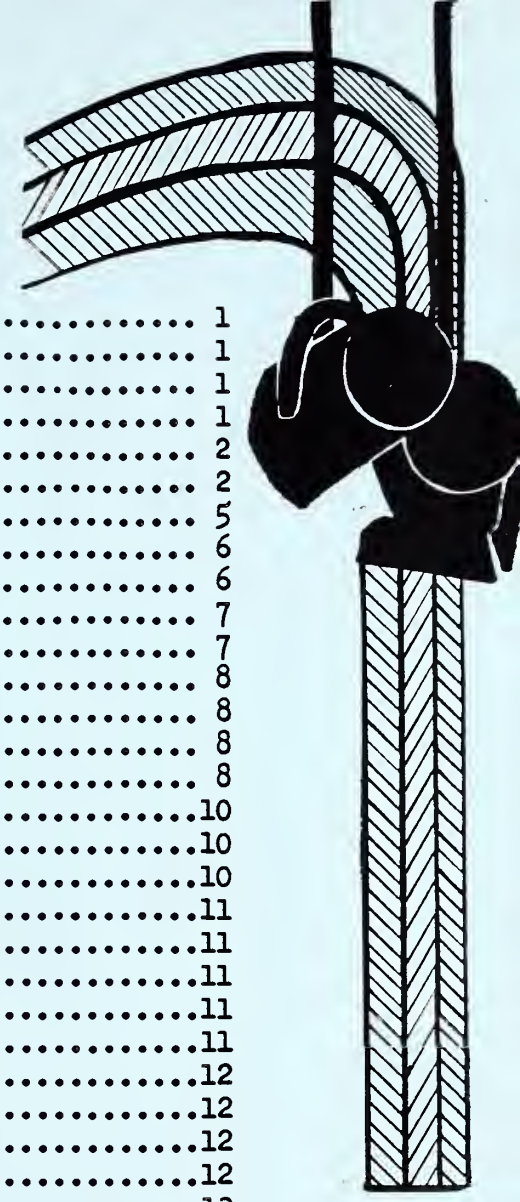
$10 to: Barbara Pillasch
$5 each to: Ellyn Bryce
Sharon Peck
Steve Siedler

POETRY

$20 to: Barbara Pillasch
$5 to: Sharon Peck

COVERS

$20 to: Judy Belfield



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Barbara Pillasch

IMPATIENT

Gray February
Plods morosely toward spring
But sometimes she skips.

****

Ronna Oldham

WHEN I STOPPED TO NOTICE

I used to waste my time,
All my time,
Pursuing rainbows who could care less
If I lived
Or died.
If I had only stopped long enough
To look back,
I would have noticed people standing, waiting
With open arms for me to turn around.

I finally did.

****

Barbara Pillasch

CONVERSATIONS

Missy, my aged Sheltie follows me slowly up the stairs and I turn and wait and she looks at me and her dim eyes plead: wait for me. This last morning, this brilliant June morning--silently we speak. I say, I have to kill you today, you know, and she says, I know, and climbs another stair, only wait for me now, and I say, I will; I'll wait.

One more stair--she hauls herself up and collapses there on the landing and says, this is the last time, and I say, yes, the last time--did I feed you now, your favorite treat--did I tell you I have to kill you today? She says, yes, I know, I know, so let me eat--let me sleep--you'll take good care of me.

I pull a package of hot dogs (her favorite treat) from the re-

Mary Lou Limbach

PROGRESS

In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania there was a situation.
A nuclear reactor leaked a little radiation.
Experts say that there was no harm,
But, the animals give us cause for alarm.
Three Mile Island has a zoo.
There they have a "llama-roo."
A "flamingorilla" is what you'll see,
It's pink, has a beak, and swings from a tree.
"Cowl" is the animal next on the list,
She's milked each day and is clearly wisest.
Our "hippapotamouse" is right this way,
He eats 50 pounds of cheese each day.
A "chimpanzebra" is right over there,
He loves bananas and has black and white hair.
Turn to your left and a "duckshund" you'll find,
Has four webbed feet but doesn't seem to mind.
A "piguin" you'll see if you look to the right,
He stays in cold weather and oinks with delight.
These animals might seem odd to you,
But, there'll be a lot more by the time we're through.
If you think these critters are strangest by far,
You should see the new zoo in the U.S.S.R.!

****

frigerator and her tail goes thump and I feed her some and say, you sleep now and soon we'll go down to the river and sit in the sun--I'll have some meat and I'll put the pill in and give it to you by the river and you'll fall asleep with your head on my knees, with your head on my knees by the river. Then, I'll take you to the vet for the needle and she says, so easy for me, so hard for you.

Missy naps; she will sleep for hours.

(continued)

I go to visit my aged mother in the nursing home--every Tuesday I visit her in her tiny room which she shares with an old woman the same age: eighty-eight and sometimes at first I can't tell them apart. Today, my mother knows me--it's easier when she doesn't know me and the only words she has spoken in years are, "Fine," and "Do you have to go now?" though sometimes she tries very hard to speak--most of the time she doesn't try.

"How do you feel today, Mom?" I ask and she looks at me from some distant reverie, and her eyes puncture me and she says, "Fine," and she stares at me and I feel my heart flee and I hold her hand and I rub her back and I think of little things to say but I am lousy at small talk (so is she) so we don't talk at all--then I babble for a moment and give up; does she see? Does she understand me?

She looks away and I stare at her--is my mother in there? and she turns back and our eyes collide and silently we speak. She says, have you abandoned me? I say, no, you have abandoned me--you have gone away and left me, your child, to fend alone and watch you while you sit and dream and I ask you do you ever cry and are you lonely and where are you and what do you see when you reverie and when you stare at me so do I exist? and she says, enough, let me go.

Sometimes I make a little joke and she understands and she smiles and that terrifies me and I must leave before I weep and she says, "Do you have to go now?"

I let myself in the door and Missy wakes and I say, it's time, let's get it done and she says, yes, you have to kill me today, I know--will you carry me down? and I say I will, I'll carry you down. I pick up the meat, laced with the pill and I lift her in my cradling arms and we go down the stairs down to the river in the brilliant sun and I sit and lean against a maple tree and she straddles my knees and she nibbles her treat and we wait and silently we speak. I say, sleep now, and she says, yes, I will, I'll sleep--so easy for me--so hard for you, and I say, yes, and who will do it for me?

****

Judy Belfield

CONVERGENCE

Last week it rained
two days straight--
one of those
April seiges
gray, but lacking charm.
Tree limbs, barely blushing green
drooped like the floppy ears
of French rabbits.
And yet, the assault was bearable
because the tulips had bloomed
and I didn't need a coat.

I'd forgotten the rain
until last night
as I drove through the countryside
and the air was cool enough
to give me dog-nose.
I could smell the damp earth
stretching out beside the highway
unseeded and
compellingly fragrant.

Remembering the rain
in that moment
and this
I feel necessary

****

Sharon Peck

SCREWMANJI

(With apologies to Chris Van Allsburg, author or Jumanji, a book about a jungle game for children, I offer "Screwmanji," a story for the adult who still likes to play games.)

"Now remember," said Tina, "Robin and I are bringing some of the guys by when we'r done at the mall. If you and Dad go anywher make sure you leave the door unlocked."

(continued)

"Don't worry, dear," her mother answered as she straightened the stack of newspapers into a neat, orderly pile. "I'm sure we'll be here when you get back. We really haven't made any plans. Your dad will probably spend the day watching TV and I have enough ironing to keep me busy all afternoon."

"BORING!" Tina rolled her eyes, then waved as she bounced out the front door.

Margaret sighed her agreement as she looked at her husband, sitting in his well-worn easy chair, feet propped up on the coffee table. I really wish he'd let me get rid of that tacky-looking chair, she thought, and does he have to put his feet on the table that way?

She walked into the immaculate kitchen, plugged in the iron, poured herself a cup of coffee, and stood for a moment, staring out the kitchen window. She looked out, over the backyard, finding it a pretty picture. An artist couldn't have painted the sky bluer, the grass greener. She looked at the Silver Maples, bursting with color that signaled an early fall, and a sudden impulse grabbed her. "Tim," she called, unplugging the iron and emptying her coffee down the drain, "Let's go for a walk."

"Right now?" His raised eyebrows questioned the seriousness of her uncharacteristic spontaneity.

"Sure," she answered, her smile confirming the invitation. "Come on, let's go."

Tim left the comfort of his chair, turned off the television, and in a moment the two of them were outside, arms linked compatibly.

"Left, right, or straight ahead?" he teased Margaret as they approached the corner. She breathed a sigh of contentment, recalling the childish game they had played with Tina when she was just a toddler. My goodness, she thought, that was ages ago.

"Well?" Tim prodded her back into the present.

"Oh, I don't know . . . you decide."

"Well, now m'dear, since you have wisely deferred this important decision to me, I say we go . . . LEFT."

It hadn't taken long for him to enter into her lighthearted mood, and they strolled along the sidewalk, happily, leaving all the cares of this world behind them.

"Oh, Tim, look!" Margaret exclaimed as she pointed in the direction of a tall tree which had begun the task of shedding its brightly colored leaves. She wriggled free from his tender grasp, cooing, childlike. "Aren't they pretty?" She bent to pick up a few samples and suddenly her foot stumbled over something hidden beneath the pile of dry leaves. She brushed them aside, and they crackled their resentment at being disturbed. What's this, she wondered.

SCREWMANJI.

Margaret stared for a moment at the big red letters which stared boldly back from their spot on the long thin box.

SCREWMANJI.

"What's up?" asked Tim.

"I don't know," responded Margaret. "It seems to be a game of some sort. Come on, let's take a closer look."

"Don't mind if I do," said Tim, still feeling quite jovial. He knelt beside his wife and frowned slightly at the strange new word.

SCREWMANJI.

"Well, Madame, as your attorney, I insist on reading the fine print before we proceed any further."

"SCREWMANJI. A game of innuendo and illusion. Fun for those with an active imagination. Please read all directions carefully before play begins."

"Well, Mags, whattaya think? Should we give it a try?"

She smiled at his unexpected use of her childhood nickname, and feeling a sense of adventure, answered, "Sure, why not? It has to be more interesting than ironing."

The walk home didn't take long, and soon they were back in the living room, spreading the game out on the floor.

Margaret glanced at the gameboard, finding it rather ordinary-looking, while Tim began to read aloud the directions.

"1. Player selects piece and places it at START. 2. Player rolls dice and moves piece along path of free and fanciful. 3. First player to reach the Scarlet City and yell SCREWMANJI is the winnter. 4. VERY IMPORTANT. Once a game of SCREWMANJI is begun, it will not end until one player reaches the

(continued)

Scarlet City."

Tim handed the dice to Margaret, saying, "Go ahead, Hon."

"Okay, here goes nothing." She dropped the dice.

"Nine."

She moved her piece to the ninth square and read "U. P. S. man arrives with special delivery." She looked at Tim, who wore a puzzled expression on his face. He was staring over her shoulder, and she turned to see what had caught his attention. There stood the U. P. S. man, one hand on his clipboard, the other on his belt buckle.

"What do you want?" asked Margaret.

He answered with a broad smile, dropping both his clipboard and his pants.

"Uh, Tim . . . I think you better take your turn . . . NOW!"

"Why don't I just throw him out?"

"Something tells me that just wouldn't work. And besides, it would be rude."

"I could call the cops."

"Tim ! What would the neighbors think?"

Tim thought it over as he looked down at the gameboard. What if he rolled a ten? Then he'd have to greet the Happy Cooker and watch her demonstrate the newest chef spread. He snatched the dice and gave them a toss.

"Seven."

He moved his piece and landed on a square that read, "Bitten by love bug. Love at first bite." He heard a distant humming noise which grew nearer and louder until he felt a sudden sting on his left cheek. "Ow!" He instinctively touched the spot, already swelling, and turned to Margaret.

He drew in his breath sharply. She was beautiful! He felt that he had never seen such loveliness before. Her clear blue eyes sparkled, her complexion fairly shone. Soft ringlets of auburn hair, highlighted by the sun, gently framed her pretty face. He noted, as if for the first time, her delicate features, her cute little turned-up nose, her countless tiny freckles.

"You're gorgeous! I love you!" he cried out, unable to contain his emotion.

"Why Tim, I love you too," she responded, almost shyly. "But let's get on with the game, shall we?"

The appearance of the love bug had caused the disappearance of the U. P. S. man, and Margaret wondered what would happen next.

She rolled a twelve and moved her piece accordingly. "Boss buzzes you in. Wants you to sharpen his pencil."

A buzzer signaled her into the kitchen. The oak pedestal table was gone and in its place stood her employer's mahogany desk.

"Come in, Margaret, come in. What kept you?"

"Why, Mr. Mahoney . . . I didn't expect to see you here." She paused, then added, "although I really should have . . . I mean, I think I should have . . . "

"What are you mumbling about, Margaret? Why on earth <u>wouldn't</u> I be here? This <u>is</u> my office." And so it was. Margaret looked around the room, recognizing the dark paneling, the deep plush carpet, the leather wing chair reserved for special clients, the family portrait hanging on the west wall.

"Sit down, Margaret, sit down." He ushered her into the seat of honor and, leaning against the edge of his desk, placed his hands on her knees.

"I find you very attractive, Margaret, very attractive. I want you to know that I really care about you." He leaned closer and slipped his hands, slowly, up her legs. She wondered why she'd never noticed his clammy palms and leering grin before.

Suddenly, they heard a noise like thunder, and the entire house, including Mr. Mahoney's office, began to shake. Margaret ran through the hall, into the living room, and found Tim, standing at the bay window, grinning from ear to ear.

"What is it, Tim?"

"My airplane!" He pointed excitedly to the game. "I rolled doubles! Don't you get it? My dream . . . it came true! Look!" He pointed again and this time she read the square he'd landed on. "Wildest fantasy becomes reality. Enjoy."

Just then the doorbell rang. "Captain,

(continued)

we're ready for you," said the flight attendant standing on the front porch.

"Oh," said Margaret, "I think I get it."

Tim looked sheepish. "I've always wanted to make it in the air."

"But she called you 'Captain'."

"That's the other half of my fantasy . . . being the pilot of my own plane."

"Oh . . . doubles!" Glancing toward the kitchen, she breathed a sigh of relief as she spotted the oak pedestal table standing in its usual position, shaking slightly.

"Come on," urged Tim, "our plane awaits."

Together, they boarded the airplane that stood outside. The next two hours passed quickly, and after Tim had made an expert landing in the street, they returned to their game.

"I think it's my turn." Margaret shook the dice, hoping for doubles, and dropped them onto the board.

"Eleven." She counted out the squares and read "Mailman comes. Wants you to lick his stamps."

Out of the corner of her eye, she spied the mailman, his bag spilling letters onto the living room floor. She panicked. "Tim! Hurry, take your turn!"

He gave the dice a quick tumble and rolled a six. He moved his piece to the square that said, "Snowbound." Little snowflakes began to fall gently from the ceiling. The mailman vanished as a sudden chill filled the room.

"Do you feel a draft?" Tim asked, beginning to shiver.

"Yes, I do," answered Margaret, reaching for the warmth of her grandmother's crazy quilt.

The flakes continued to fall until the carpeting was covered with a thin, soft blanket of glistening snow.

"I'll get some warmer clothes," Tim said, disappearing around the corner. He returned within minutes, armed with jackets, hats, scarves, and mittens.

Thus protected from the frigid temperature, they began to enjoy their indoor winter wonderland. Margaret laid down in front of the bookcase and stretched out her arms and legs, making angels in the snow. Tim busied himself making a snowman in the corner next to the grandfather clock.

"Isn't this fun!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Sure is," answered Tim. He stepped over a drift and knelt down over his wife. He kissed her playfully on the nose and buried his face in her scarf. "And you're fun too." She really is, he thought, as he fell into her open arms. "Now, let's see if we can find a better way to keep warm."

They did . . . and when they decided that enough snow had fallen, Tim handed Margaret the dice.

"Go for it, Mags!" Throw an eight and you'll win the game."

Margaret closed her eyes, shook the dice, and let them fall, one at a time. One four, then another. She moved her piece to the Scarlet City and shouted, "SCREWMANJI!"

She and Tim hugged each other, smiling, laughing, feeling very warm despite the cool temperature.

Gradually, the snow began to dissipate, and before long, had disappeared altogether, leaving behind not a single puddle, not a single bit of slush, no telltale sign at all.

Margaret rested her weary head comfortably on Tim's shoulder as the two cuddled together on the sofa. Tim pushed the game under the couch just before they were overtaken by exhaustion and fell asleep in each others' arms.

It was in that position that Tina and her friends found them when they returned from the mall.

"Would you look at that?" Tina rolled her eyes in disgust. "Even the TV and ironing were too much for them. Boy, what a boring way to spend the day!"

****

Barbara Pillasch

SURPRISE

Red and black designs
Undulate on soggy leaves.
Swarms of ladybugs

****

Mary Lou Limbach

LIAR, DECEIVER

Liar, deceiver,
Makes a sneaky cheat out of the most
honest souls.
It can rip your life to shreds,
And make you laugh all the while.
Parents fear it...controlling their
children.
It becomes your religion, when you pray
at the porcelain
altar.
This gift from "God's Country" is a
Present from Hell in disguise.
People die from it, for it.
Folks are M.A.D.D. and S.A.D.D.
But, when it's "Miller Time,"
You'd better get the hell out of the way.

Know what I mean, bartender?

****

Ellyn Bryce

ONE-UP-MANSHIP

The man staggered across the room, drunkenly swaying until he fell on his knees before a musician seated on a bandstand who was ignoring the man's condition. The drunken man gagged and spewed vomit all over the musician. People seated around the room looked with horror and disgust. Many jumped to their feet and ran screaming out the door.

I got up and turned off the television. Scenes like that get to me. Even if the acting is great, it's repulsive. That movie reminded me of my cousin Fran, who lives in California, and I haven't seen in years. The "gross out" queen. When we were children that was her specialty. She would try to make all of us sick so she could have our ice cream, candy, and treats. There was only one time I remember getting the best of her. It was during the summer when I was staying with my grandparents. My cousin and her family lived only three houses away from our mutual grandparents. When I'd come to Joliet to visit, Fran and I couldn't wait to see each other. About two days later we were fighting. She was highly competitive and played for keeps. I always seemed to take a challenge, no matter how useless it was. We had some interesting battles.

There was a hot dog stand about six blocks away from "gram's" house. Fran and I had permission to walk down and get hot dogs this particular Saturday afternoon. She was twelve, two years older than me. Our relationship at that time was of an older superior woman-of-the-world with a younger gullible child. This really infuriated me.

"I bet a hot dog with ground-up flies oozing with pus, could be so-o-o good," said Fran. This is how she planned to eat two hot dogs, hers and mine.

"Yours would be better rolled on the chicken house floor," I said, referring to the chicken house they kept in their back yard. I wasn't as good at this game.

"Yes, but green chicken guts spread all over yours would be slimy, chewy, and yummy." Fran struck again. My stomach rolled.

"I think you should have cockroaches in your oatmeal tomorrow morning." I tried again. That made a nasty picture in my mind. Not only could she make me sick. I was helping it along.

All this didn't seem to affect her. She spun around on her toes. "Rotten fish eggs, full of maggots, squashed like grapes on moldy bread, for your lunch," she crowed. This was definitely her game and she knew it. I couldn't give up. Stubbornly I tried again.

"Chopped-up worms mixed with sewer water in a milkshake." That was my best effort. Fran just laughed in my pale green face.

We walked into the hot dog stand and ordered two hot dogs with everything, double onions, to go. I leaned on the counter feeling a little queasy. It felt as if Fran had won again. The girl was putting our order together when she ran out of onions. Taking a lethal-looking knife she began chopping a large onion. The blade slipped, slicing a deep cut in her finger. Blood spurted on the table. She grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her hand.

(continued)

"Oh, oh, tie your hand, I yelled. She managed to pull the towel around her wrist. I helped her pull it snugly. We held her pulse point at the wrist for fifteen minutes or so, holding and releasing.

"It seems to have stopped bleeding. I'll be okay," she said.

"Maybe you should go to the hospital."

"I'll call my boss to come and relieve me. He lives nearby."

Fran looked shaken. "Do you think you'll bleed to death?" She shuddered.

"No, I've done this before, being careless. I don't think I'll even need stitches."

"We can wait until your boss comes, so you won't faint or get sick," I said.

"Don't worry, you can go. I can even finish your hot dogs." She sprinkled onions over the sandwiches and wrapped them in paper with her good hand. We paid her and left carrying our paper bag. We always ate on the way back, but Fran looked a little glassy-eyed and pale.

"Open the bag. Let's eat," I said.

"I don't feel good. I'm going to be sick."

"Don't be such a baby. That lady will be fine," I said.

"I know, but the blood and all." Her voice was weak.

"Well, I'm hungry. Give me the bag." I ate the hot dog as we walked along.

Fran said, as we neared the house, "Here, I don't want this. You can have it." It took effort to eat the second hot dog. I really didn't want it, however the chance to show up my cousin was too tempting to pass by. I told that story all week to everyone. When Fran would try to "gross me out" after that, I'd remind her of the "bloody hand" till it wasn't effective any longer.

****

Jen Niermann

SEPARATES

Triangle
Full of wind
bobbing, flapping
Over the ocean blue
Sail.

****

Mary Lou Limbach

BETRAYED

Hailing a taxi,
Standing in the rain.
My life is twisted,
Filled with pain.
My man's birthday,
Gave him a surprise.
Walked in the room,
Couldn't believe my eyes.
Saw him in there,
Saw her too.
Now what do you suppose
I saw them do?
He touched her there,
She smiled--that's good.
She kissed his lips,
(I knew she would)
I stamped and yelled.
"Now ain't this sweet?"
Turned to the door,
Made a hasty retreat.
He ran to catch me,
Calling in the night,
"Let me explain,
It'll be all right."
Made up a story,
Fast as can be.
Didn't even blink,
When he lied to me.
Now I walk,
Alone and afraid.
How could he do this?
I'm so betrayed.
Three long years
Of love and trust.
Gone so fast
In a moment of lust.
In my mind,
They laugh at me.
Am I the fool
I seem to be?

****

Judy Belfield

BEAST

Hacklebacked
high-haunched
hyena ugly
the evil one creeps,
sniffs traces
of hunting hounds
howling in the midnight
miles away
past fields of moonlit blooms
the color or bridal satin
waxen-petalled and heavy-headed
like dying gardenias.
The evil one
growls long and low
its teeth gleaming
lips glistening,
waits for the familiar sound
of a delicate slipper
stepping lightly
out of a blue-fogged lane
when, a sudden lunge later,
the sky explodes blood--
slickly brilliant eruption
of crimson lies
and cruelties
hidden in darkness
where the evil one
will slay the thing it loves
and finally kill itself.

****

Barbara Pillasch

LONELINESS

Ubiquitous shadow
Shadows me
As I long for love's tender touch.
Gliding, clinging
Treading on my heels
Visiting my nights
On my days intruding--

A ghostly guest
Uninvited.

****

Ronna Oldham

ARTIFICIALITY

Candy-created,
Jelly-molded people
Feign friendship in the
Sugary tones of their voices.
Eventually though,
Rain will pelt
And melt the sticky surface,
Revealing bareness
Behind that wall-of-a-thousand-smiles,
But until then, the artificial sweetener's
Consistency only thickens.

****

Steve Siedler

EVERYBODY LOSES

I decided early that morning to take a walk in the woods. Sometimes the ca-thunk of hiking boots combined with the rustle of fallen leaves gave me a sense of serenity a peaceful isolation that was not unlike the effects of self-hypnosis. Some bars have attitude readjustment hours. Walking in the woods was my personal version of the attempt. I was really hoping that it would work that morning.

As I ca-thunked along, I was thinking about bars, and changes, and Robin Hood. I had a personal relationship with each. I had spent a lot of time in bars, on both sides of the bar. Lately, changes, the major-league variety, seemed to be occurring at least twice daily. Then there was Robin Hood. You see, I had grown up with Robin Hood, not the truthful image of the man, but the Errol Flynn version. You know, protecting the defenseless, willing to die for justice Robin Hood, real hero stuff.

I began remembering a bar called O.J.'s, where I had worked while in college. I was the night guy, which had meant I saw the fun people. At night, O.J.'s had been my place, not legally, of course, but my rules were the bar rules. I had liked that.

(continued)

It had been like performing live, every night, telling jokes, performing stupid magic tricks, playing weird music and dancing behind the bar, all while mixing drinks and being in charge of the party. I had dealt with drunks, hookers, dealers, and people who thought they wanted to fight, all quickly, fairly, and non-violently. In fact, in two years at O. J.'s I had only lost my temper once, and had been a little ashamed afterwards.

A young attractive girl named Augie used to come in every night at about nine. She would order a Coke and some chips, then hold out some change. Augie was nineteen and pretty, but her capacity for comprehension was very limited. Mentally I would have aged her at seven. Anyway, she would hold out some change and ask, "Is that enough?"

"Yep," I would answer. It rarely was, but I always gave her some change back anyway. Augie carried Tootsie-Pops in her purse to give to kids in the neighborhood, just because she liked kids. She would sit and drink her Coke and listen to the music, always cheerful, always smiling. She used to laugh at my stupid jokes, even though I don't think she understood many of them. She told me she liked to walk in the woods, that she felt at home there.

I guess I felt sort of responsible for her when she was at O. J.'s. I tried to protect all my people, but I felt almost like a big brother to Augie. The regulars knew that and were friendly, although careful not to try to take advantage of her. I guess she had made me feel like Errol's Robin Hood, at least a little.

On a Friday night, a stranger had sat next to Augie. She hadn't really understood, but he was trying to pick her up. When she didn't respond he got obnoxious and grabbed her roughly. I was over the bar in a flash. I had been pissed off to start with, but the guy took a swing at me. I punched him once, then half carried him outside, where I rammed him, head first, into the tailgate of a blue Ford pick-up.

It had taken a quick shot and a beer to calm me down. I had been so pumped up that I couldn't stand still. Some of the regulars had applauded, but it was like they were in another world. Augie had put her hand on mine and said, "It's okay, Steve, you wanna Tootsie-Pop?" The tension had been broken, and cherry was my favorite flavor.

Yep, good old O.J.'s, I had been missing the place and decided to take a drive out there. It would be nice to see a few familiar faces. It was a bit of a drive, but no big deal, and as I pulled into the parking lot, I wondered how Augie was doing.

I walked in and was stared at by a very unfamiliar crowd. I ordered a Bacardi and Coke from a strange face on the other side of the bar, then began looking for a placeable face. I found one.

Gail had been a waitress at the same time I had tended. She was a nice person, but working in bars has a tendency to turn people into party animals. We talked about old times for awhile. Then I asked about Augie.

"Oh, that's right," said Gail, "you weren't here."

"Huh?"

"Well, about six months after you quit, a couple of guys picked her up in here. You know Augie, she didn't really understand. Anyway, they just kinda grabbed her and dragged her outside. There must've been eight or nine guys there. They just stood around and watched."

"So what happened?" I asked anxiously.

"They took her out to a forest preserve, raped her, robbed her, and beat her up pretty bad. Then they just left her there. She probably had about a dollar in change with her."

I stared into my drink.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"I don't know, some hospital out of state. I guess they did some pretty sick things to her."

"How many guys watched them drag her out of here?"

"Eight or nine at least. The bartender thought it was a joke."

I stared into my drink a few moments longer, then turned around and walked out. I thought I heard Gail say something, but didn't really care what it was. I bought a quart of Bacardi and drove in a blur until I started to see Michigan road signs. I was drunk, legally twice, but mentally I felt very sober. I pulled off the highway and into a forest preserve, got out of the car, and began to walk in the woods. It was just light enough to see.

I walked in a fairly straight line. I could see how someone could feel at

(continued)

home in the woods. I ca-thunked my way along thinking about bars. There would always be bars. I thought about changes. They came whether you wanted them to or not. I thought about Augie, simple, trusting, beautiful, child-like Augie, being raped and beaten and who knows what else. I stopped walking, doubled over, and vomited.

When I finally straightened up, I thought of Errol's Robin Hood again. Obviously that Robin Hood was dead. Or worse yet, maybe he just took a good look at the world around him, and disappeared into the forest in disgust. Maybe somewhere along the line ideals just became lost, like the contents of my stomach in a forest preserve in Michigan.

Attitude adjustment? Maybe. But sometimes it gets pretty tough not to give up on the whole fuckin' world.

****

Judy Belfield

DISENCHANTMENT

In time, I'd grow my hair
as long as Rapunzel's
spilling from the window
of my turreted prison
with tears not magic enough
to reach the prince's eyes.
I am alone
by the witch's decree
locked up tightly
in a stone shaft
blaspheming heaven.

In time, I should grow my hair
longer than the story of god
and certainly as true.
After doing up a braid
I should loft it down
with the soft giggle of innocence
and see no one waiting
no one wanting to make the climb.

I never wonder any more;
the sunlight washes in
and crashes on the mirror
where I spy a clump of silver
I've tried to deny--
and I know
there is no prince.

****

W. A. Kahle

A BITTER ROOT

Satin regrets inside a locked closet
collecting moldy grandiosity,
are breating for more room . . .
fuel the flames of jealousy
torch the burning lusts
dig through the earth for power.
An elevated subconsoious
carries the man's sacred keys
up to the high door,
called "Perseverance--"
to free a sordid concept for life.
Ravenous for more poison,
the lies increase
until one day the reasons
exceed the Truth.

****

Lynn M. Manypenny

WINTER FINALLY SCOOTS

As Spring approaches
And flowers bloom
There isn't anytime for gloom
The sweetness of the Spring air
Is captured everywhere
The earth has rekindled
A lovely glow
Sun has melted the muddy snow-
Trees are accepting their yearly shoots
As grass peeps through the soil
And Winter finally scoots.

****

Mary Lou Limbach

SENTIMENTAL SUMMERTIME

Blue jean
summer haze
tall grass
and bumblebees.

A lifetime documented in knees.
Big screams over
little scrapes.
A kiss and a band-aid and
it was time to run.
A memory in every scar,
Roller skating, bike rides
Sneaking off to the park,
in your Sunday best.
Jars of fireflies,
and a bouquet for Mom, 'cause,
She was always there to
Make it better.

****

Judith Smith

FOR ME

Walk along the beach,
see for me.
Reach down and touch the sand
feel for me.
As the wind caresses your face,
sigh for me.
Watch the antics of the seagulls,
smile for me.
Take time to build a sand castle,
have fun for me.
As the cool water laps against the shore,
wade for me.
Enjoy such sweet pleasures,
deeply for me.

****

Barbara Pillasch

REDWING BLACKBIRDS

April sits in a
Tree--her scarlet epaulets
Ablaze with sunfire.

****

Donna F. Aiello

ANOTHER DAY

The Moon is but a shadow
the Sun allows to shine.
And when thoughts run so dark and deep,
full of pain and doubt.
Remember as the light folds
and darkness claims its own.
To flutter on the wings of change
and wait upon the dawn.
Then view the light round Earth's true edge
strip the black from over head,
and silence stars
twinkling gainst the void.

****

Judy Belfield

NOT TO ME

Mother sang a lullabye
not to me
but to pass the time.
Afterward, she said
"That's Brahms,
'Brahms' Lullabye,'"
and her black eyes sparkled.
I remember the name
dropped in my six-year ears . . .
Brahms, Brahms,
rocking like Baby
on the treetop
in his wee bed.
I know a name,
composer, he's called,
writes lullabyes
to put babies to sleep
not me.
I don't even have to tell--
"Brahms";
I just know in my head--
"Brahms."
I'm so smart.
And lucky to have a mother
who sings lullabyes
not to me
but knows composers' names
and has big black eyes
that see everything.

****

Jen Niermann

HUES

Loneliness

Loneliness is gray.
It is sour as a lemon.
It smells of an onion.
Its sound is silent.
It feels like a lake with no waves.

Friends

Friends are all colors in a crayon box.
They smell of all the different flowers.
They sound like city noises.
They feel like a securtity blanket.
Friends taste like a big bowl of mint-
chocolate-chip ice cream.

Joy

Joy is a brilliant yellow.
It sounds like a symphony.
It feels like the ocean's crashing waves.
It tastes sweet like honey.
It smells sweet like the honeysuckle
blossom.

Anger

Anger is the black of midnight.
It feels like a hurricane.
It sounds like a volcano.
It tastes like jalapenos.
It smells of pollution.

****

W. A. Kahle

THE BACK PORCH

While I lean across the seat
to give her a kiss
the moonglow illuminates her
eyes and hair,
I don't care
about anything as I love her
and listen to the trucks on
the freeway riding away.

****

W. A. Kahle

CINDERS

A remembered argument
like a crushed cigarette,
may smolder
for a time--
possibly to die a quick death,
or spring up again
to flare itself
in ravaging consummation . . .
resentments cling,
are stubborn to squelch
as bedrocked ideals cement
a man's will to reject forfeit
of the right to be right . . . forgive.

Just like the smoke lingering
off factory stacks
the remnants left behind
deposit clues along the way
of incinerations blazing--
lacking all mercy
within an everyday mind.

****

Ronna Oldham

BROKEN WINDOW

A million veins surged
Through the immense span of glass
Stunned.
Countless sparkling spears
Riddled the ground beneath,
Dragging the sun down with them,
Like a peach sliced from its space
On the horizon.
Surviving stalactites whisper
A faint
But resonant hum in
The smooth-sailing wind
While the remaining needless will drop
in despair
And become crushed underfoot; but
A winter darkness continues to grope
onward
In patient persistence,
Across pulpous sky.

****

Judy Belfield

CATATONIC

I sit black-caped
on a rocking chair
like Sybil's mother
in a January cabin
escaping the city
for a rest beside firelight.
I sit still, solemn,
eyes fixed in a drugged stare
and worry if I will be buried alive,
my gaping eyelids
closed over gently
by a soft set of fingers,
and I pray for mercy
like a murderer in Purgatory
the last day of cleansing,
try to scrape free of sins
burnt into my stomach long ago
by a god who counts transgressions
on a silent abacus
but brands the totals indellibly . . .
I am Sybil's mother
come to rest beside firelight.
The cabin door, ajar,
lets in the ice winds
of a daughter's screams
but I feel nothing
at last nothing

****

W. A. Kahle

SECRET SANCTUARIES

Dancing through the fog
the momentum of satin memories
float through my eyes
pausing to rest
at the peak of a high crest,
the glint of radiant intensity
blots out the uncertainties . . .
knowing the one you are
often brings sadness, or a brighter star.
Life is a breathing melody
in sync with everybody
and if there is fear
it's a splendor to recall
the surrounding arrival of the fog.

****

Walter M. Kosinski

WATCHING THE SHADOWS MOVE

Sometimes late at night
With the moon shining full
I lie awake thinking
While watching the shadows move.

The night goes by,
A small bird sings,
I look out of my window to watch it fly
Against the darkened sky.

It flies away then nothing moves
And nothing is heard,
Not a sound but a wind
Flowing with the moon.

Nothing can be seen
For everything is dark,
But life goes on and moments pass
And dreams fade away.

Sometimes late at night
With the moon shining full
I hear a whisper in my heart
While watching the shadows move.

****

Barbara Pillasch

PAMELA

Dreary winter of your life
By your hand ended.
Your soul a silent empty street
Windswept and barren -
Inscrutable and alone
You faced the deepening dark
Until you could no more.

****

Mary Lou Limbach

RED, ORANGE, YELLOW FIRE

Red, orange, yellow fire
Splash and kiss the horizon
As nighttime draws near.

****

W. A. Kahle

GHETTOLAND

Dark conscience
unguided by light
no longer a nuisance
as two ex-lovers pause
beside a mraked-up wall,
stained without a favorable cause.
Hard lives
unfaithful wives
low pay checks
a pain in the . . .
heck.
Early Friday nights
too droll to begin
prized brutal fights
on the south end . .
liquor stores closed
til four-thirty sharp
don't care if one chose
the rough life, tough . . .

The refuse is flying
on a frontal crisp wind
while buses surge onward
ignoring the sin.
And as a rusty, dying muffler
explodes its last backfire
no one could hear her
soft scream
as the junkie's blade slid in.

. . . . everyone is searching
for that gleaming, livid life that
comes uneasily planned
for those of us existing
in ghettoland.

****

Sharon Peck

A MAN OF EXCEPTIONAL CLASS

A man of exceptional class
Serenaded a lovely young lass.
They sat on a donkey,
He sang in the wrong key,
Then kissed the young lass on the ass.

****

Ed Wisniowski

UNDEAD

Statues have feelings. The room was full of living statues, each staring blindly at a hardwood desk with a priest chanting legal mumbo-jumbo that would finally put to rest a dead man. The priest had a letter opener in his left hand as he read off the legal scroll. Poised like a weapon, it was capable of many horrible things. Today, it would open the will of a dead man.

None of the statues moved, they just stared at the man. The most grim statue was the dead man's ex-wife with the two children. She was weathered by the ages and abuse that the world had handed her. The other statues once remarked that she may have been beautiful at one time. They were never sure.

A tired brother also stood testimony to this ritual. His grey hair no longer a secret, he brought up a family continuing the blood line of his parents and the dead man.

The heir to the entire family was a 21-year-old student who more than anyone else could see the pointlessness of this ceremony. All he could do was squeeze his mother's hand and wait. The exterior of his soul was stone but inside he still had blood flowing through his veins.

"Now in order for this document to be official three of his relatives must sign here," said the priest in the grey flannel sports suit. "Since you are his brother, you should sign first."

The grey haired man signed as the young man felt his mother's grip tighten on his hand.

The young man thought to himself, "I don't want to remember my uncle this way."

His thoughts drifted back to the crucible of his life. Spending long hours before a typewriter pecking out stories and doing homework, John Aspire would sit there smoking, watching his nephew try and meet his day's quota of homework.

"Uncle John," the young man would say.

(continued)

"Did you find that job today?"

He would just take a puff from his cigarette and say, "Nephew, I got this job working for a bank downtown hanging oak doors at a bank."

"Nice."

"Well, you do good work and your name gets around," he would say proudly.

Some nights he would talk on end about wood floors, or cabinet making, while his nephew would type away his troubles. Other nights he would brood about his life while watching old movies.

"Nephew, what are you doing?"

"Oh, nothing much, just trying to write up this story. I have a big quiz tomorrow so I might as well type up the notes on it."

"I never went to college, ya know that," he said regretfully.

"Uncle John, you graduated from trade school, didn't you?"

"Ten years as a journeyman for what, to fix cabinets for people who never worked a day in their life for $17.50 an hour." He paused then looked at the boy-man. "Nephew, when you get out of school, make sure that you never look down on the people who work for you. You're going to be somebody; don't make this life any harder for others than you have to."

"You're doing okay, Uncle John."

"I'm 34-years-old and trying to get divorced," he lit a cigarette. "All my life, I've done good work and each time, the people who I worked for gave me the shaft. I got a lot of faith in you, nephew, you're going to be something. Don't let me down."

That was the last time the young man really talked to his uncle. John Aspire left for work the following morning and never came back. Packing his clothes away, the young man found scores of empty bottles of Valium. Four months after he vanished, his wife gave birth to a seven-pound bundle of uncertainty.

"Mr. Brudsinski, would you please sign the document?" The priest took on the look of the typical lawyer sympathy for people who don't follow directions.

"Sorry," said the young man.

His uncle's ex-wife looked smugly at him. For the first time in a long time, the young man saw her smile. She was strong again, knowing that she could now bury the unpleasant memory of her ex-husband and get on to raising her children.

"Just sign here," the lawyer said. With the stroke of a pen, he had now pronounced his uncle dead.

"Thank you, I think that we will break for lunch, then we will read the will." The lawyer then escorted his clients out the door like cattle.

The world is indifferent to the personal tragedies that go on during its existence. Grovers Seafood Bar was no exception to this law of nature. Waitresses running politely around filling orders, cooks poaching shrimp, and boring elevator music echoing throughout the restaurant all testified that the world had to go on even without John Aspire.

"You did the right thing, Son," said the young man's father. "He's been gone for five years now and nobody has seen or heard from him."

"But he isn't dead, Father, he's just missing," said the young man.

"Living people visit their children," said the dead man's ex-wife.

"I don't know. I think he's still alive."

"Believe what you want; he's dead. Now maybe we can get back to living again," said the ex-wife.

The young man's mother just sat at the table and stared at her food.

"Are you going to listen to the will this afternoon?" said the father.

"No, Dad, I need some time to think. School's going to be starting shortly, and I have to think about going to grad-school next year."

"Son, I'll see you at home."

"Sure, Dad." He didn't even mind paying the check when his relatives left.

The bar wasn't too crowded for a Wednesday afternoon. People wearing masks of friendliness and swallowing $2.50 drinks gave Grovers Bar an air of respectability.

Solid oak woodwork covered the entire wall of the bar area. Made to look worn by the sea, it seemed phony, but businessmen and secretaries loved this place because it reminded them of the old tall ships that they had seen in the movies.

"I'll have a rum and coke, please," said the young man.

"Coming right up." In no time flat, the bartender had a perfectly-poured drink before the young man.

"Thanks." With that, the young man

(continued)

sat down along the wood wall.

Maybe his uncle was dead, he thought to himself. It didn't matter now that he threw dirt into his grave signing that paper. His mother was really shook up by the whole affair. Why did Father even bother bringing her along? It didn't matter now. Nothing mattered except that Uncle John was officially gone.

Just a few tables down from him was a small brass plate screwed into the wall. Some sunlight was reflecting off it making a face-shaped pattern of light on the floor. Drawn to it like a moth to a candle, the young man couldn't help but find out what that little piece of brass had to say.

"John Aspire, Journeyman Carpenter."

"Damn you," thought the young man. "You're dead and now you haunt me. Somewhere in the world John Aspire is still alive."

If the young man could not see his uncle, at least his work still lives on.

The young man raised his glass, tipped it to the sky, smiled, and finished his drink.

****

Ellyn Bryce

FAMILY PICNICS

Family picnics
by the river
Children running
down the pier.
Saw a catfish
in the seaweed
Get my pole
Call Uncle Jim.
Tell my mother
where I am,
so she doesn't
scream and holler
I'm not hungry
Want to fish now
Get the boat and
minnows out.
Got to hurry
Fore they catch me
make me take
my cousin with.
Here he comes
Push the boat off
He's a sissy
he can't fish
Now he's screaming
so they'll hear him
hurry, hurry!
here they come.

Hit my cousin
I'm in trouble
He deserved it
Tattletale
Don't forget
To tie the boat up
and to put
the oars away.

****

Judith Smith

TERRI

I see her face
in the shadows—
I hear her laughter
through the trees—
I feel her touch
on the wind and
as I think of her
I smile.....
My smile suddenly turns
to a frown
and tears fall like rain.
I realize that
she is gone.
I miss her.
I need her:
more than I ever dreamt possible.
But, one day, after time passes—
when my heart stops mourning,
I will feel the touch
See the smile
hear the laughter
that was Terri.

And once more,
I will smile.

****

Barbara Pillasch

NEW FOSTER CHILD

Child
Savaged.
Child of misery
Drifting on heartache
Into sleep
Every dream lost--
Your sob
In the silence resounds.

Sleep;
Now your pain
Shared will ease
And your dreams
Will be regained.

****

Barbara Pillasch

OLD WOMAN

Faded flickering
Eyes in aged reverie
What visions perceived?

Do you sever grief--
Does your wasted withered shell
Become young again?
Do you see old friends
And the world when it was new
And innocence reigned?

Are you regarding
Beauty as you sit and muse
In your reverie?

****

Sharon Peck

LITTLE JACK HORNER

Little Jack Horner
Sat in the corner,
Dreaming of Little Bo Peep.
He rub a dub dubbed;
When his dub had been flubbed,
He heartily went back to sleep!

****

W. A. Kahle

FAIT ACCOMPLI'

Riding on a midnight rain
at four in the morning
defines the state of mind
a freaked-out mind is in.
A fifth of bourbon is gone
my bills a town away
from the last month
I ran away at forty-four
crying in a drugged drunk
confession in solace--
I'm a bum.

****

Sharon Peck

IF MOTHER GOOSE ONLY KNEW. . .

THE OLD WOMAN

There was an old woman
Who lived on a boat.
She had so many children,
She couldn't stay afloat.
She gave them perservers
And tossed them to sea,
And now she's as happy
And light as can be!

****

Sharon Peck

CAPTAIN CROSS

The toys were aflutter with the news.

"Wow!" exclaimed Raggedy Andy. "A real captain."

"I wonder if he's handsome," said Esmerelda Sue, shaking her blonde curls.

"Hmmm!" pouted Raggedy Ann, "What would a Cabbage Patch Kid know about good looks? Personally, I don't care what he looks like, as long as he has a pleasing personality."

"Pleasing personality, indeed." The stuffed owl rolled his wise, old eyes. "My dear, have you forgotten his occupation? He's a soldier . . . a wooden

(continued)

soldier, to be sure. It would be quite contrary to the character of a commissioned officer to be anything but stern, severe, and scrupulous!" Having favored the others with such words of wisdom, he retired to the toy chest, where he could escape the morning sun peeking through the nursery window.

"Oh, Annie, don't let him upset you," Barbie comforted her younger friend. "You know how he enjoys a good debate. Besides, I've been thinking about the Captain, too." She winked before continuing. "But please don't say anything to Ken; he gets so jealous."

Raggedy Ann smiled gratefully and looked around the room, her button eyes coming to rest on the matchbox cars in the corner.

"Hey guys, whattaya think?"

But they appeared indifferent to the excitement that hung in the air, as they noisily revved up their engines.

"VA-ROOM! VA-ROOM!" The Green Machine challenged the red Vet, and they were off.

"Well," grumbled MY PET MONSTER, "I'll tell ya what I think. I think it stinks! We don't need a soldier around here. I can do a fine job of guarding the nursery without any help from anyone. A soldier! Hmmm! What kind of a birthday gift is that for a five-year-old anyway? Grrr!"

"Ssh! Be quiet," warned the rocking horse. "I think I hear someone coming down the hall."

They became silent as the door to the nursery was flung open. A beaming Michael burst into the room, followed closely by his sister, Samantha. It was difficult for the toys to tell which of the two was more excited. The bright smile on Mike's freckled face was proof that he was happy with the new wooden soldier that Samantha had chosen for him. She was pleased, too, proud that her choice had been the right one.

The rocking horse grinned as he recalled the "woman to woman" talk that Sam and her mom had had as they'd planned Mike's birthday. "Come on, Mom, I'm old enough to pick out his gift all by myself. I have the perfect idea!" The horse was glad that, at seven years of age, she didn't feel too old to saddle her trusty old Silver for an occasional ride.

"Where ya gonna put him, Mike?"

"Up here, on the top shelf . . . right next to my piggy bank."

Michael stood on tiptoe, stretching to reach the spot that would become home for the impressive-looking new toy. Smells of breakfast drifted up the stairs, and Mother's cheerful voice called them into the kitchen.

"Coming!" The children gave the Captain a final look of admiration and ran downstairs.

The door had hardly closed behind them when the nursery was filled with hubble-bubble as all the toys tried to get a closer view of the forbidding-looking soldier.

"Wow!" Raggedy Andy nudged his twin. "Look at his uniform. It's so. . . so . ."

". . .patriotic?" offered MY PET MONSTER.

"It's beautiful! So elegant and formal," said Raggedy Ann.

And indeed it was. The proud little soldier stood as tall and straight as the black velvet stripe that contrasted boldly with his royal blue trousers. Gold-fringed epaulets adorned the broad shoulders of his brilliant red jacket.

"He must have an awfully big head," giggled Esmerelda Sue. "Look at the size of his hat!"

"Now, now," chided Barbie. "We musn't make our new friend feel unwelcome. Every soldier wears a tall hat. It's traditional." She cleared her throat and looked at Ken.

"Oh . . .uh. . .hello there. My name is Ken. Glad to make your acquaintance." He offered him his hand.

The Captain merely glared in a very unfriendly manner, refusing to even nod his wooden head.

"What a crab!" growled the monster.

The matchbox cars had stopped racing to give the newcomer a quick once-over. They remained quiet just long enough to decide that he wasn't worth a second look, and went back to their noisy race.

The chitter chatter of the toys continued and the nursery noises became quite loud. Suddenly the sounds were interrupted by a thundering voice.

"ATTENTION!"

(continued)

The toys were all shocked into silence, even the matchbox cars. Everyone looked expectantly at the wooden soldier, his demeanor marked by firm determination.

"I am Captain Timothy Cross, member of the 808 Division, Captain of the 89th Battalion. It is my duty to inform you that your behavior is most undignified and must be stopped immediately!"

The toys began to murmur in protest, but hadn't gotten very far when Michael and Samantha returned.

"Are you gonna play with your new soldier now?" Samantha could hardly wait for the answer.

"Oh no," answered her brother. "He's too good to play with. He's just for looks."

Samantha looked down at her feet. "Oh . . . I thought maybe we could fill the bathtub and send Captain Cross on a boat ride around the world."

But Mike was adamant, so the soldier remained in his place of honor on the shelf, high above the other toys. Samantha had really been looking forward to that cruise, but being a resourceful girl, decided to dress Barbie and Ken for the prom instead.

The summer day passed quickly as the children played lovingly with their favorite toys. All except ONE, that is. The unyielding form of Captain Cross stood firmly in place, taking himself very seriously. Every once in a while, his dark, disapproving eyes seemed to narrow as he saw an activity that he found unsuitable for sensible toys.

Later, when sweet dreams, love yous, and God blesses had been said, the nursery came alive again. Wise Old Owl stretched and yawned. "Allow me to introduce myself," he began. But he was interruped by the soldier's solemn clearing of his throat.

"Excuse me, Owl, but I don't have time to waste talking to you. It is my duty to guard the nursery."

"As you wish, my friend. However, I must warn you, when the rest of the household sleeps, this room awakens. I shouldn't want you to miss the enlightening conversation and lively interaction that take place."

"If you're referring to all those ridiculous games and foolish gossip, forget it. I don't need it. I have more important things to do."

"Actually, I was speaking of the love and friendship that we share. You know, someone much wiser than I once said, 'It is not good that man should live alone.' We all need each other, whether we choose to recognize it or not."

"Not me! I'm made of wood. I don't need anyone."

"How sad that you should have such feelings."

"Feelings? Huh! I don't have feelings. I'm a wooden soldier, remember?" He stood straight as stilts as if to prove his point.

"Yes, Captain Cross, I remember . . . a soldier, a wooden soldier."

With that, he joined the others in their merriment, occasionally stealing a glance in the direction of the Captain. At one point, he thought he saw the corners of his mouth twitch, and wondered if it had been the beginning of a smile.

Weeks passed. It was always the same. The nursery toys did their best to befriend the little wooden soldier, but he made one excuse after another. "Oh no, I can't go in the water with you. I might get bent out of shape!" or "I can't ride that smelly old horse; I might ruin my trousers!"

Suddenly, in the middle of a day that had begun in an especially sunny way, Sam burst into the nursery. She looked around the room quickly, rushed over to the shelf, and grabbed the Captain. "I hope this works," she mumbled as she left the room in a hurry.

The toys were rather puzzled and became even more so as several days passed before they were visited by a lonely Samantha, who was strangely quiet. She spoke to the dolls, referring vaguely to an accident, saying something about a concussion, double vision, and a brain scan. These were new words to them,and it took some time before Barbie was able to explain them clearly.

"Michael fell from the top of the jungle gym and was knocked unconscious. The doctor is quite concerned about him, and has ordered special tests. He has to stay in the hospital for a while so Samantha thought it might be nice for the Captain to keep him company."

"Captain . . . you mean OUR Captain?" Esmerelda Sue expressed the surprise shared by all the other toys.

Barbie smiled at her choice of words. "Yes, our very own Captain

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Cross."

"Hmmm. . . " pondered the owl, as he wrinkled his wise old eyebrows. He grew very pensive. After a few moments of meditation, he remarked softly, as if to himself, "We are happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep."

"What are YOU mumbling about?" demanded MY PET MONSTER.

The owl stretched thoughtfully before he gave his reply. "I think that perhaps Samantha possesses more insight than even I realized. Her gesture may have consequences of far greater significance than any of us would have thought possible." Having concluded his brief dissertation, he promptly fell asleep.

"What did he mean?" asked Raggedy Ann.

"Just wait," answered Barbie, "I have a feeling that before long, we'll all understand just exactly what he means. . . even Captain Cross."

Three days later, Michael returned home from the hospital, the little wooden soldier clasped tightly in his hands. As soon as the two of them entered the nursery, the others sensed that something was different. Although the Captain's uniform was slightly faded and worn, his face glowed with a brightness they'd never seen before. Gone was the grim look of disapproval from his eyes. In its place hid the hint of a twinkle. His wooden form, once so rigid, was now relaxed.

Michael was happy to be home again, and so, apparently, was the Captain. Just before bedtime, Sam started to put the wooden soldier up on the shelf.

"Oh," said Michael, "don't put Captain Cross up there. He belongs in the toy box, with the rest of the toys."

When the children had been tucked in for the evening, the lid to the toy chest flew open. Toys spilled out, one by one.

Barbie and Ken made plans to take in a movie while Raggedy Ann challenged Andy to a game of checkers. Esmerelda Sue and MY PET MONSTER took turns riding the rocking horse, and the red Vet coaxed GREEN MACHINE into yet another race. Heading for the sea in the bathtub were Wise Old Owl and the wooden soldier, having what sounded like an intelligent, yet friendly, conversation.

"What kind of a cruise are you interested in, Captain Cross?" asked the owl.

"Well, I'm not quite sure. I've been up on a pedestal for so long, I seem to have lost touch with the rest of the world. I don't know where to begin. And by the way, I'd be much obliged if you'd call me Captain Tim."

The owl smiled and patted his new friend on the back. "It seems to me that you've already begun . . . Captain Tim . . . and an excellent beginning it is."

His smile was returned and the two embarked on what was to become a most wonderful trip indeed.

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Steve Siedler

OWN RULES

I guess making decisions, like most processes, are a combination of questions and answers, of setbacks and forward leaps. Last night, I had no answers, and definitely no energy for forward leaps. It was late, I had just gotten home, and I was tired, not exactly the perfect mixture for creative living, let alone original thought.

Things, meaning my daily routine, had become, just that, routine, dull. I mixed myself a Bacardi and Coke and sat down in my favorite rocker to contemplate the day's excitement, or rather, lack of.

The excitement part took eighty-six seconds. A cute secretary had smiled at me. The action had taken about five seconds, but my subconscious had stretched it to eighty-six, just because it was the highlight of the day.

The lack-of part could have taken half the night if I would have allowed it to. Instead, I decided to sift through the mail. Bill, toss. Bill, toss. Bill, toss. A post card, a nice one too. Belgium? Had to be a mistake. I didn't know anyone in,

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or from, Belgium. I looked at the signature. It was signed simply "Willy."

The only Willy I knew was an old friend I hadn't seen for a while. He had left the area a couple of years earlier, but, except for a long vacation in California, I hadn't really known what he was up to, although an occasional letter led me to believe he was still in the country.

I read the card. It was general information, except for the last line. It read, "I picked this card out for you because of the picture, so if you don't like it, fuck you."

I turned the card over and studied the picture. It was a small sailboat somewhere off the Belgian coast. The sun was setting in the background, and it seemed to me, to be the perfect card to get from a guy like Willy.

I set the card aside, then stood up, walked over and turned on the stereo. A new version of an old song was on FM, "Respect Yourself." I settled back into the chair to sip on my Bacardi and Coke.

So, Willy was in Belgium racing moto-cross. Moto-cross was supposed to be big in Europe. The combination of Willy and motorcycles was a natural one. They had been together in one form or another for many years. In fact, as children, we had met at a neighborhood dirt track, both putting around on bikes that were much too slow for us. Most kids in the neighborhood couldn't afford the most up-to-date equipment, so our potential for development was severly limited.

Although there were similarities, even then, the differences in our personalities were apparent, even on the track. Willy loved to slide around corners, keeping as true a line on a sloppy track as if he was riding the berm, the banked wall that built up around the outside of the corners as bikes continuously moved the dirt outward. He picked his line carefully, then stayed with it, knowing there would be ample time to change. Willy could change quickly if he decided to, but he always considered the alternatives before committing himself.

I was a little different. I loved the jumps. There was something about the adrenalin rush that accompanied being airborne that, even today, overshadows almost any other sensation. The thrill, the adventure of being airborne while riding an earthbound vehicle, rates above just about anything, except sex, but that's an entirely different story. The only problem with being airborne is that you don't always come down where you thought you would. I used to occasionally have the same problem that airliners have, overshooting the landing space. That's why the post card was so appropriate. Willy used to call me Steve the Sailor, because, at times, I'd sail right over the landing area.

As we got a little older, it became evident that Willy was developing an almost undeniable determination to decide things for himself. Public opinion really didn't matter much when Willy decided that he was right. Comments of "No way," or "It can't be done that way" merely brought a grin, a hand brushing back sandy hair, a head cocked sideways and an almost inaudible "Fuck you." Then Willy would almost always go ahead and do it.

Well, at any rate, quick or pokey, we grew up a little more. I was there to see Willy cry with his first real broken heart, and six months later, he was there for mine. I was also there to see Willy back down from big Ron Saunders in front of a crowd, only to see him take on both Ron and his brother when he caught them shooting at a cornered dog in a dead-end alley with a B. B. gun. Willy was there to see, and hear, me belch over the sound system in my first professional jazz solo, only to come backstage, grin, cock his head to one side and say "Fuck you!" That got me through the night. Like I said, Willy had a unique talent. He could grin and say, "Fuck you!" to just about anyone, and get away with it. He even said it to Kathy Simon. She had been upset, and was trying to take it out on Willy. He simply turned, brushed his hair back, grinned, cocked his head sideways and almost whispered, "Fuck you."

Visibly upset, she retorted, "You wish!"

Willy paused, then calmly stated, "You know, you're right."

She began to laugh, and if I recall, they started dating steadily that night. Yep, even Kathy Simon had let him get away with it, and she had a reputation for not letting anyone get away with much of anything.

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I'm really not sure whether people actually let him get away with it, or if they just realized there wasn't much they could do about it. In any case, large or small, Willy and his attitude survived, and it was mainly due to that attitude that I received a post card from Belgium. You see, Willy was a player, and thought everyone else should be too. Some people liked to watch, and that was fine, too, but Willy was a player. He adhered to his own code of ethics, developed through years of confidence in gut reactions and trust in himself as a decent person, despite some opinions of others. He was philosophically congruent, and probably never more so than the last time I saw him.

We were sitting in a bar, or at a bar, whichever you prefer. Willy was uncharacteristically quiet. He brushed his hair back, then quietly confided, "I've become very introspective lately, Steve."

"That's nice to know. How come?" I asked.

"I've been trying to figure a few things out." There was a brief but noticeable silence.

"Well, that's nice to know, too. Uhm, am I supposed to figure out what you're talking about all by myself, or are you going to help me with this one?"

Willy grinned, "Okay, smartass, I'll give you a hint. I was thinking about all of the people in the world who try really hard to succeed, actually accomplish their goal, then end up not liking themselves when they're all alone, thinking about who they really are."

"Oh shit, Willy, you're not going to give me a rambling philosophical dissertation, are you?"

Willy grinned, cocked his head sideways, then said, "Fuck you" very quietly.

"No thanks, I'll pass."

"Come on, Steve, you know what I mean."

"I was just thinking about sweet rolls."

"What?" I knew what sweet rolls were, but had never related them to a personal philosophy of life.

"You know, breakfast rolls, the stuff that you might eat in the morning when you're half asleep, but if you tried to eat them for dinner, when you were awake and thinking about them, you'd probably gag."

"Have we just entered the twilight zone, Willy? If we have, I'm not sure I like it."

"Maybe. Kathy's dad offered me a position with his firm, expense account, company car, and four hundred a week clear." Willy paused, then shook his head. "He doesn't even know if I can handle the job. Hell, the guy doesn't even like me."

"So what, you know you can handle it."

"Yeah, but he doesn't. That's my point. You know, I've been going to church with Kathy's family lately. I've been trying to pay attention, but I think I'm the only one. Last Sunday, I caught myself spouting their beliefs by rote, and I wasn't even sure whether or not I had done it before without noticing. See what I mean? Sweet rolls."

"You mean the sugar-coated clumps of shit that are so sweet that you can only swallow them if you don't think about what they are?"

"Exactly!" Willy appeared elated. "Well, that same night I was at Kathy's house for dinner, talking about the same damn things as always, when suddenly, I woke up and thought about sweet rolls."

"So what?"

"So, I gagged."

"Willy, you're about to make me gag. What the hell are you trying to say?" Willy loved abstractions. He was kind of like a butterfly with words. He always knew what his point was, but unless you pinned him down verbally, he kind of flew all over the place. It was possible to walk away positive that you understood him, even though you hadn't achieved the slightest degree of comprehension.

"So, I turned 'em down."

"Willy, I've never seen you turn down food."

"No Clyde, I turned down the job, the ritual family dinner every week, the B.S. in general."

"I bet Kathy loved that."

"Yeah," Willy brushed his hair. "We had a fight, and she wanted to win it, so—I let her."

"Very sporting of you."

"Fuck you!" Willy grinned.

"Wo what happened? You're going to take the job?"

"No, Steve, I didn't say that. I just said that I let her win the fight. So now I guess she hates my guts. I mean,

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the girl has never even seen my guts, but now she hates 'em. I think she wanted me to be what she wanted me to be, even though that's not the guy she fell in love with. Does that make any sense?"

"Yeah. It's scary, but it does."

We finished our drinks quietly, then ordered another round. Willy had the look of someone who had just decided something. Sort of like someone who had just won an inner debate with a brain-popping argument.

"So what's up with you?" Willy asked finally.

"I don't know. I can't seem to shift out of first gear." I began to snap my fingers, then sang, 'I'm takin' what they're givin' 'cause I'm workin' for a livin.'"

"Sounds kind of dull." It was dull.

"So why don't you come along?"

"Where?"

"California."

"Yeah, right."

"Steve, if you think about it, there probably aren't that many happy people in the world. I intend to be one of them, don't you?"

"I intend to take a shot, but not in California. I can't afford it."

"Just an idea." Willy finished his drink quickly, then said, "Well, I've gotta go, Steve."

"Okay, I'll see ya round."

"Yeah. See ya."

What I didn't realize at the time was that when Willy said, "I've gotta go," he meant "go." About a week later, I received a letter from California, talking about the sun and sand and bikes. Willy had sent a picture of a guy doing a flying W along for effect. A flying W happens when a rider goes off a jump, his feet leave the pegs, and when he lands, he's still clutching the hand grips even though he's upside down and his feet are spread high above his head.

So now Willy was in Belgium. I guess, other than racing bikes with or without snow, he's busy doing what he always did, being himself. Not really such a bad goal, if you think about it. Certainly better than a constant diet of sweet rolls, or a lifetime of watching.

At first, I thought maybe Willy and I had changed roles, but it seems that he's still on the ground picking his lines through the curves, while I'm still up in the air somewhere.

At second, I thought maybe he was running away, but he never really did. Instead, he's running toward something, and when he gets there, I'm sure we'll hear about it, even from Belgium.

Like I said before, I really don't hear from Willy very often, so in honor of the occasion, I decided to write this. For those who don't particularly care for it, in keeping within the spirit of the event, try very hard to picture Willy, brushing back his sandy hair, grinning, with his head cocked to one side. If you can picture him, and you see his lips move, I think you can imagine what the words would be, spoken quietly.

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W. A. Kahle

A SECOND REMEMBERED

When the grass is green and wet
or the light rain mists
all over my face
I know that I am special
because it is so "super good."

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Ronna Oldham

WHAT IS YOUR EXCUSE

Why do you place obstacles
Between us?
Is it wrong for me to understand you?
Are you too good for me?
Is it your age,
Or your work,
Or your parents,
Or your fifty girlfriends,
Or simply your stubbornness that
Causes you to avoid me? None of these?
What then, <u>is</u> your excuse?

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Paulette Georgantas

SPIDER AND MOTH

Spider climbs upon the wall,
Spindle legged, black and stark,
Weaving webs against a fall,
Cornered safe in shadows dark.
Cocooning deep in home-spun womb,
Shying from the bright of day,
He sleeps within one tiny room
And dreams of what may come his way.

From his nesting, he beckons me
To lay upon his sheltered bed,
To envy his tranquility
And rest my wings on sticky thread.
But I, as worm, once lived as he,
Asleep within my silken tomb,
Dying to what used to be,
sequestered-in metamorphic gloom.

Now, I am winged and made of different cloth,
Reborn to soar above the trees.
In darkness I became the moth
To catch the currents of the breeze.
Sun-baked wings alive in flight,
In search of all there is to see,
I seek the heat of day, eschew the night,
Ascending to my destiny.

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Barbara Pillasch

SINCE YOU ARE GONE

Since you are gone my
Heart is a dried up leaf, blown
To dust and scattered.

****

Barbara Pillasch

GILTON

When I moved to Gilton I had two cats and one parrot. Lulu is a gray longhair and Sassie is a Siamese. The parrot's name is Fred. In a little less than a year, I have rescued and found homes for four cats and two dogs. One of the homes was mine. I kept two of the cats and one of the dogs because I couldn't place them. My apartment is getting smaller. This can't go on. Can it?

For as far back as I can remember, I have been rescuing animals. I can't help it; it is compulsive. I used to try to fight it, to no avail. Finally, I just gave myself over to it, and accepted the fact that I am a sap.

I carry bags of dog and cat food in my van. I am nearsighted, yet I can spot an animal in trouble a hundred yards away. I have stolen pets that I knew were being mistreated or neglected, made a spectacle of myself on more than one occasion, and have repeatedly been told to mind my own business.

I have divided the human race into two categories, regarding animals: animal lovers and civilians, civilians being people who are not animal lovers. Get it?

I have been ridiculed and insulted by civilians, condescended to and humored by my friends and stared at by strangers. I have been called sentimental as though sentimental were a contagious disease. Civilians seem to think that animal lovers are unsympathetic to humans. They are wrong. Granted, we all know at least one eccentric animal lover who has absolutely no use for his fellow man, for whatever reason, but the vast majority are kind, gentle people (albeit a little nutty on occasion) but their caring invariably spills over to every living creature on earth, animal or human.

Civilians say to me, "There are people dying of hunger all over the world, why should I worry about some damn cat?" This logic bewilders me. Interestingly, these same people usually aren't doing anything about hungry people or the damn cat. This false concern for people is nothing more than a rationale for not rousing themselves to give aid to a suffering animal. I believe there is something inherently wrong with someone who allows an animal to suffer if he is able to prevent it.

I help people whenever I can. I work on a volunteer hotline and I do community service, but I am not where people are dying of hunger. This is not happening in

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my sphere of existence. People don't come to me--animals do. They find me. They have some sixth sense that lands them in my space. It is eerie. Sometimes I feel that I am being manipulated by some unseen force. Other animal lovers that I know have experienced the same thing. It is as if we have been "recruited" to look out for these least creatures.

I am on the plane that I am on. Animals are caught here with me, with us, struggling and suffering jsut as we do. They are just as lost, confused and frightened, and they can't even ask why. I need to believe that, as the greatest humanitarian makes a difference in this brutal, bloody world, so can I, insignificant I, make a difference in my space, however infinitesimal. I have the power to make my space a little brighter, a little less cruel. We have to start somewhere.

I am not on a crusade. I live on a small fixed income, so I can't afford to go searching for hapless animals. I don't have to. When they happen into my space, however, I must do something. Not choices here. They are alive and so am I. They count. If I didn't believe that, I would have to believe that I don't count and that terrifies me.

On the radio the other day, someone told about a young girl who was driving out of town one afternoon. A dog ran in front of her car and she hit it. She pulled over and stopped, ran back to where the dog lay and saw that it was dead. She also saw that the dog had recently given birth. It was very thin and was obviously a stray. The girl searched the nearby field hoping to find the puppies, but found nothing. She got back into her car, turned around and went back into town. Within an hour, she returned with a small crew of friends and neighbors who searched all afternoon. By dark, they had found five puppies and homes were found for all.

Don't you love it? Wouldn't you love to live in a town, a country, a world of people like these?

Albert Einstein was an animal lover. I figure I'm in good company.

I found cat number three, whom I've aptly named Bad, in front of the bakery across the street from my apartment and antique shop. She was fat and friendly and had been hanging around there all day, following customers inside and getting kicked out by the irate proprietor. Most people ignored her--a few kicked at her viciously as she tried to rub against their legs.

That evening, I caavassed the neighborhood, but was unable to find anyone who knew her. Satisfied that she was lost or dumped, I scooped her up, brought her home, and ran an ad in the local paper, in case someone was searching for her. Nobody claimed her.

I was walking along the river one morning early in October, hoping to spot a beaver or a muskrat. The air was warm and still and the day was golden. Wild mallards drifted downstream, their amiable honking and the dry leaves crackling under my feet the only sounds until I heard the frantic mewing of a kitten. I searched the brush along the shore, and followed the sound to the rear of Bonnie Brown's antique shop on the corner, two doors from mine.

There, on the top of the steps leading to the basement, I saw a tiny kitten. I approached, and it ran through the open door.

"What you lookin' at" It was Mr. Stahl, Bonnie's landlord, who lived in the apartment above her shop. He was an energetic, stocky man, in his middle eighties, hard of hearing, with the curiosity of a child. His face sported a smile because he breathed through his teeth, causing a soft perpetual whistle. Everyone called him Grandpa.

"You lookin' for that cat?"

"It ran into your basement," I said into his good ear.

"I know. Ran down there last night. Tried to get it. Wild little bastard."

I knew Grandpa was soft on ducks. I didn't know how he felt about cats so I decided not to make an issue of it. I did know that most of my neighbors did not take kindly to strays, especially cats, which, in their eyes, ranked slightly above a river rat. I also knew that they already regarded me as being a little off-center when it came to animals. I'll come back later, I thought. No need to make an ass of myself.

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Bonnie appeared in the doorway of her shop, her red hair ablaze. How does she get it so red, I wondered. "Are you looking for that cat? That thing yelled at my back door all day yesterday. It hides in that pile of junk, there."

"It's just a baby. Did you feed it?" I asked, knowing that she hadn't.

"No, Louise. I did not. And don't you feed it either."

"Why not?" I demanded. She looked at Grandpa and rolled her eyes.

"Anybody want a duck for supper?" said Grandpa.

Grandpa, who had lived in Gilton all his life, had begun feeding the wild mallards that lived on our section of the river "thirty--forty years ago." His farmer friends drove around back in their pick-ups and dropped off gunnysacks full of corn. Every morning at seven-forty-five, Grandpa fed the ducks. Whenever he saw one of his neighbors, he asked him if he would like a duck for supper. As far as I know, nobody had ever accepted his offer. I often wondered what he would do if anyone did.

Without waiting for an answer, Grandpa headed upstairs to watch his TV game shows, and Bonnie disappeared inside her shop. I went up the back stairs to my kitchen, poured some milk in a dish, went back down and put it on Bonnie's stoop, hoping the kitten would find it before Bonnie did. I left to open my shop for the day.

Throughout the day, between customers, I checked to see whether the baby had found the milk. It had come up from the basement--I caught an occasional glimpse of it as it ran from one cover to another, but it had not yet discovered the milk. I wondered why it stayed in that particular area, thinking perhaps that was where it got separated from its mother.

Later that night, I went down and put a fresh dish of milk on the stoop and went back up to bed. I woke about midnight and heard the kitten's cries through my open window. It sounded like it was right below, in my neighbor's backyard.

My neighbor, Jack Lindquist, was also an antique dealer in Gilton, although he rarely opened his shop. I hadn't met him yet, but had noticed him a few times as he hauled things in and out of his shop. He was an extremely thin man of medium height, with long, spindly legs, and could have been anywhere from forty to sixty years old. He had a long, reddish beard and always wore a shabby Chinese scullcap of faded purple satin with a gray silk tassel dangling from the center.

"Uses the shop for storage," Grandpa told me once. "Got no money. Won't work. Got no lights, no heat in there. Don't have nothin' to do with nobody neither. Look at that jungle," referring to Lindquist's back yard which was a tangle of weeds, ground ivy and wildflowers. "Keeps the grass cut along the river for us, though, got to give him that," Grandpa said. "Queer, though, one of them fairies, I hear."

I got up, unable to bear the kitten's cries any longer. I donned a robe, found a flashlight and went downstairs, moonlight making the flashlight unnecessary, the river a shimmering ribbon. Again, I followed the cries. I entered my neighbor's yard, and, avoiding stacks of lumber and scattered debris, I reached the back door.

The crumbling yellow stucco building was smaller than mine and also had an apartment upstairs, although the back steps leading to it had long ago collapsed and now lay in a dispirited pile near the back door, where I was sure the kitten was hiding. She had stopped crying when she heard my footsteps, and there was no sound but the occasional honk of a wood duck and the rustling of the birds roosting in the huge pine on the other side of the doorway. A gliding shadow startled me. A tomcat. Or a rat? I hoped it was a tom. I didn't think he could reach the baby in that pile of wood.

I ran and got the untouched saucer of milk from Bonnie's stoop and put it down near a small opening in the woodpile. I lingered a moment longer, then went back upstairs to wait for morning. As soon as I left, the cries began again. In my dark room, I listened to the desolate wails as they pierced the night. Finally, they stopped and I slept.

The next morning the milk was gone. I had brought a dish of cat food with me and I began to talk softly to the baby, hoping it would eventually realize that the sound of my voice heralded food.

"What are you doing?" a voice said. I whirled around and saw my neighbor stand-

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ing in his doorway. I hadn't heard the door open.

"There is an abandoned kitten in your woodpile," I said. "I'm feeding it, or trying to. It's wild." Here's where I get ordered off the property, I thought.

"How do you know it's there?"

"I heard it. I tracked its cries to this spot. I listened to it cry all night."

"Have you heard it this morning?"

"No," I said.

"Let's see if it's all right." He picked up a board, and then another, one at a time, careful not to let the pile shift or collapse, trying not to make any noise. "There it is," he said, and I glimpsed the kitten crawling further into the pile.

"Seems to be okay," he said. I'll just put these back." He replaced the boards, criss-crossing them to form a protective shelter.

"I'm Jack Lindquist," he said, when he had finished. "You have the shop next door. I've seen you."

"Yes," I said. "I'm Louise Gannon."

"It's going to turn cold tonight," he said, glancing toward the woodpile. "Rain is predicted."

"I heard," I said. "I guess there's nothing I can do about that. I'll never get near the kitten by tonight. Maybe tomorrow, if I'm lucky. Well, I have things to do before I open my shop. I hope you don't mind if I feed the baby here. I'll get it off your property as soon as I can."

"Feel free," he said. As I walked away, I heard his screen door slam and by the time I reached my yard the baby was crying again. I stood by the fence that separated the yards and called to it. "Kitty, Kitty," softly crooning over and over for about ten minutes. I was about to leave when a tiny black face appeared in a space between the boards. The baby crept, no longer crying, starting at the least sound, toward the dish. She found it and ate it, forgetting to be afraid.

I sighed, glanced toward Lindquist's house and saw him standing at the screen door, smiling.

Jack Lindquist is a queer bird, the people of Gilton say. "Livin' all alone in that ramshackle farmhouse with all them dogs and cats."

"Queer in more ways than one," some say.

Jack Lindquist has lived alone since his mother, Anna, died about fifteen years ago. He grew up in that old house, about a half-mile outside of town, and when he was old enough, he helped his mother with the antique business she started, right there in the farmhouse, with the money his father had left when he deserted them.

Although Jack is of medium height, he appears small because he is so skinny and his long spindly legs and reddish beard make him appear older than his fifty-odd years. His shyness makes him seem unapproachable, but those who make the effort discover a gentle man.

Some said Jack was a born wheeler-dealer, as young and shy as he was, when he began helping his mother. He and Anna were an odd pair as they scavenged the countryside in search of antiques and anything else they could sell to make a few dollars. They attended every auction and farm sale in the area and Anna, a powerful, aggressive woman with unruly dark hair flying about her face, constantly instructed the boy in the art of buying and selling.

Jack was eager to learn and didn't think of these activities as work. One day, when he was ten, Anna let him do the bidding at an auction for the first time. He felt grown up and proud and a little frightened. He'd learn, though, he'd pay attention and work hard to help his mother in the business and then some day when she was old he'd be able to take care of her the way his father should have--and that's the way it worked out.

Sometimes a loneliness came upon Jack. It first appeared when he was very small, and he would ask his mother, "Where is my Daddy?"

"He's gone; he won't be back no more," she would say.

"Why?" he would ask.

"Cause he don't love us no more, I guess. Now hush."

He would run to her and try to climb into her lap as she sat with her mending and she would absently push him away.

"Go play now, don't be a bother."

He would sit on the floor and play quietly with his toys and the hurting feeling would be with him like a shadow. Anna meant no harm; she loved the child, but she was not a demonstrative woman

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and was so absorbed in her own bitterness and so beset with financial worries that she was incapable of discerning the little boy's need.

Jack never married, never even came close, as far as anyone ever knew. He never got interested in girls the way other boys his age did. Oh, there were a few with whom he would have liked to have been friends, but they never noticed him and he was too shy to take the initiative so he spent most of his time reading when he wasn't wandering with his mother. Anna never questioned his lack of friends or his disinterest in girls, just took it for granted that it would always be just the two of them.

Once a girl named Emily became friendly with Jack. She just walked right up to him as they were leaving the high-school classroom one day and started talking to him. She was plain, but Jack thought she was nice and he would be pleased if they could be friends, even though he was a little afraid of her. They walked together after school each day as far as her house, but after about three weeks, she just kind of drifted away, becoming busy again with her girlfriends, although she was still nice to him. He knew it was because he hadn't asked her for a date and he let her go. The loneliness came over him then. He knew his mother was his friend and he was glad, but he wanted to have another kind of friend.

When Jack was sixteen, a new boy came to school. His name was David, and Jack thought he was beautiful, and thought about him constantly. He could not stop looking at him. He sat in front and a few rows over from Jack's desk and Jack gazed at his profile as though trying to memorize it. He never made any attempt to speak to him. He woke each morning with David's face hovering before him, eagerly anticipating each school day and his first glimpse of the boy, and he went to bed each night anticipating dreams of David.

Funny thing, though, the dreams of David, and later, others, were never sexual in nature. Those feelings never came fully alive in Jack, or maybe they were repressed. Even later, as a man, his attraction to other men was always marked by an aching longing for love and for love's tender touch.

One day, as Jack was leaving school, he saw David loitering with a group of boys on the front steps. David turned and looked at him, smiling, and Jack's heart thumped with pleasure and his face burned as he approached the group. "Hey, spider-legs," David called, "Where's your Mama?" The others laughed and hooted, and Jack walked on past them forcing a jaunty bounce into his step so that they would not know that his heart had splintered.

Jack matured and was respected by the good folks of Gilton for his hard-working ways and his gentle regard for his mother. He became more remote, however, his quiet solitary ways and his long, concealing beard separating him even further from his neighbors.

Anna died when he was forty-four, and he was left with the business and a small inheritance. He sold the contents of the antique shop to an out-of-state dealer bought a brand-new Ford van, closed up the house (although he continued to pay the rent) and disappeared.

While he was away, Jack had his only homosexual experience. He met a man named Arthur who reminded him of David and they became friends, then lovers, but it didn't last. Jack was not interested enough in sex, and his lover felt hurt and rejected because Jack only desired affectionate embraces and friendship. Arthur left him after a few months.

Jack returned to Gilton and the waiting farmhouse after two years with just enough money left to buy a small store in town on Front Street, between two antique shops, which he gradually filled with antiques and used furniture.

Jack Lindquist still lives out at the old place, his capacity for love undiminished, transferred to his many animals, strays that have wandered in--dogs and cats and an injured Mourning Dove that someone left in a shoe box by his garden gate one day.

His animals are his friends and love him unconditionally, but once in a while the loneliness comes over him, although as the years go by, it visits him less frequently and less intensely; more like a memory of pain.

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He still roams the countryside in the old blue and tan Ford van, searching for treasures for the shop that he rarely opens, always wearing that same old purple Chinese scullcap that he purchased at an auction years ago. He's got a part-time job now in the Watch Shop on Front Street, next to the bakery, working a few evenings a week--just enough to ensure that his animals have enough food to eat.

Sometimes when you drive past his place on a summer afternoon, you can see him, with his beloved animals, puttering among his flowers.

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W. A. Kahle

SPEEDBALLER (YESTERDAY'S OVER)

As I sit at my table, watching the robins sing
the pleasure is clouded, I can't do a damn thing.
I cannot drive a car, I drink too much
I smoke three packs of smokes a day, a wicked crutch.
I fall back dometimes into depression
many tell me that it's a psychotic obsession.
It's not my fault I've got a wife and child.
I'm twenty-four years old and very wild.
I've just got to think straight and do all I can
God, help me, I'm trying hard to be a man.

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Sharon Peck

A THEBIAN FELLOW NAMED REX

A Thebian fellow named Rex,
While under a terrible hex,
Went to bed with his ma
And murdered his pa,
Giving Freud quite a cause to perplex.

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Barbara Pillasch

DAMNED POEM

Poems are written
In ecstasy or despair
Not from content.
(Like a cow)

When I'm not sad
I'm happy but
Seldom ecstatic.
(No poems there.)

Must I be pensive,
Pulverized, paralyzed
With pain--
Anger and melancholy
Ripping, racking, rending
My soul--
My dismay and despair
Dripping doom and
Dementia death and
Desolation
Before I can write a
damned
poem?

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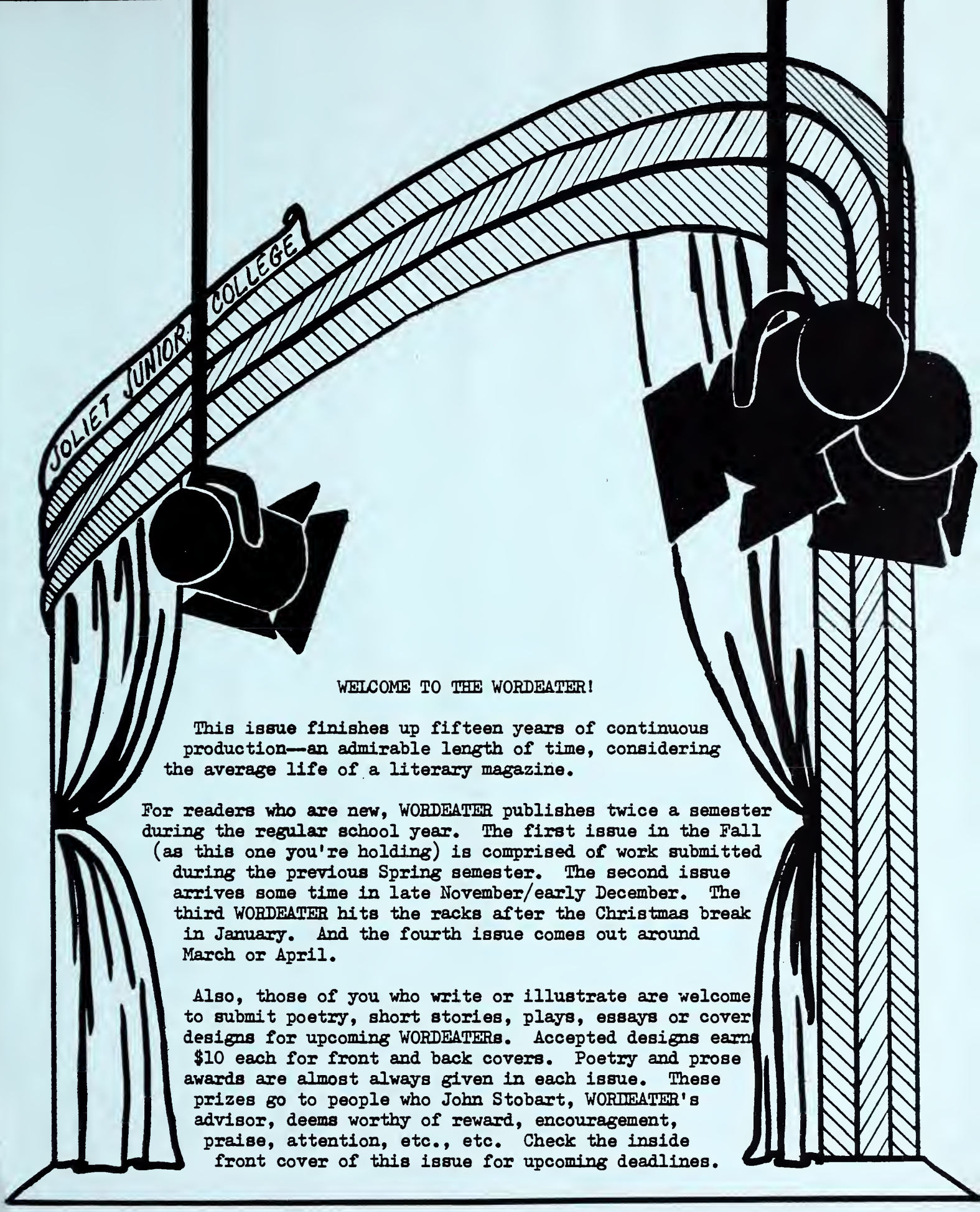
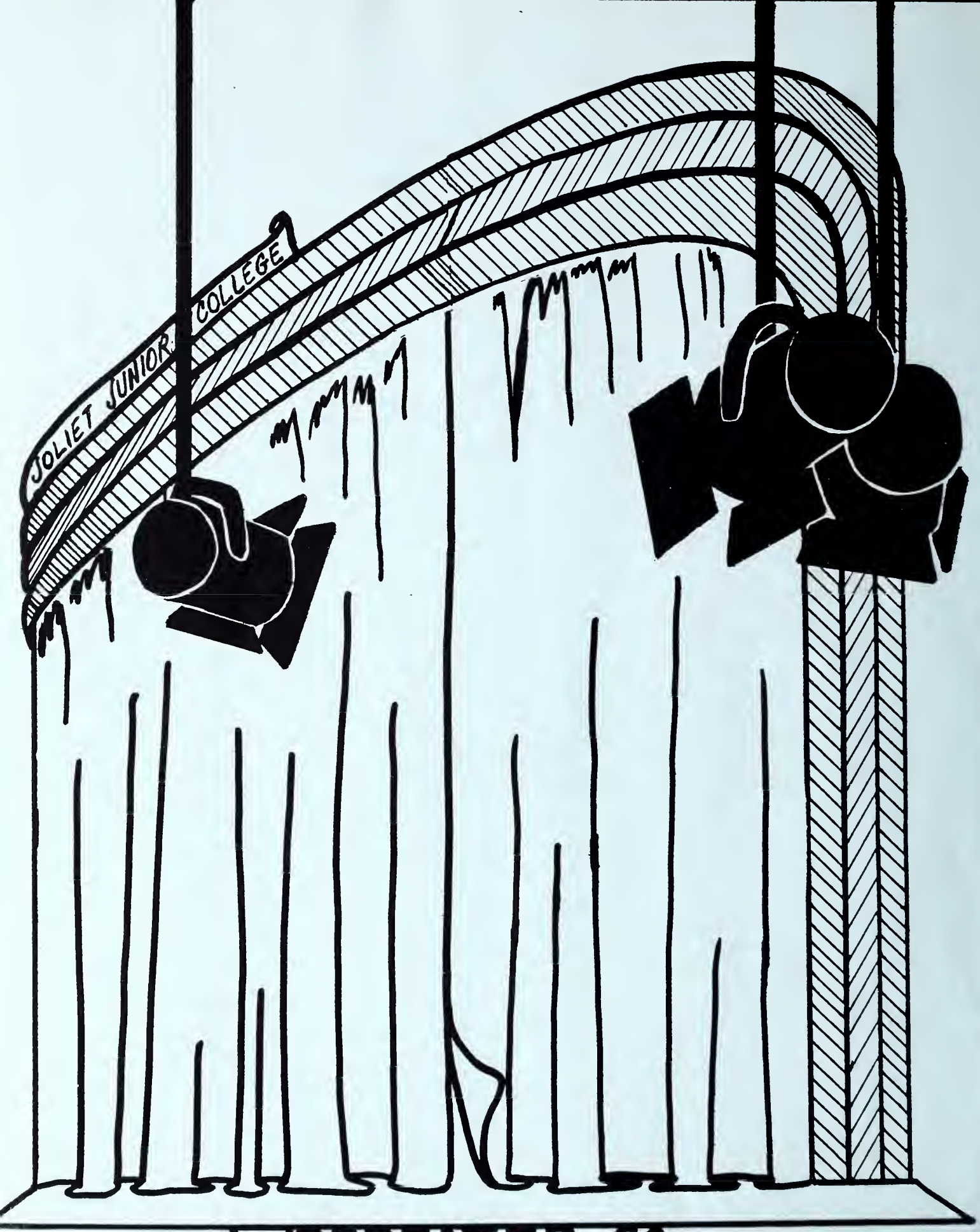


WELCOME TO THE WORDEATER!

This issue finishes up fifteen years of continuous production—an admirable length of time, considering the average life of a literary magazine.

For readers who are new, WORDEATER publishes twice a semester during the regular school year. The first issue in the Fall (as this one you're holding) is comprised of work submitted during the previous Spring semester. The second issue arrives some time in late November/early December. The third WORDEATER hits the racks after the Christmas break in January. And the fourth issue comes out around March or April.

Also, those of you who write or illustrate are welcome to submit poetry, short stories, plays, essays or cover designs for upcoming WORDEATERs. Accepted designs earn $10 each for front and back covers. Poetry and prose awards are almost always given in each issue. These prizes go to people who John Stobart, WORDEATER's advisor, deems worthy of reward, encouragement, praise, attention, etc., etc. Check the inside front cover of this issue for upcoming deadlines.



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